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Pacific Islands Fishery News

Newsletter of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

Summer 2000

Visitors and residents alike enjoy Hawaii's sashimi-quality tuna. Last year, a federal judge closed 1.2 million square miles of the high seas (beyond the US 200-mile exclusive economic zone) to the Hawaii longline fleet that lands the majority of the tuna locally. (photo courtesy of Ocean Resources Branch, Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism)

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Local Fisheries Critical, Say Hawaii Chefs and Vendors

Chefs, restauranteurs, seafood dealers and fishermen alike agree—locally caught seafood is essential to the success of their businesses.

"Seafood—that's what we got that's special," argues Patrick McCain, president of the Hawaii Restaurant Association, an advocate for the state's 47,000 private-sector restaurant employees. "We're an entertainment town, and local fish is critical. Imported fish makes the whole experience less. It's like 10 percent Kona coffee."

"Tourists come here to eat Hawaii fish," agrees Chef Cory Waite of the Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel on the Big Island's Kohala Coast. "Like Alan Wong's and Roy Yamaguchi's [restaurants], our philosophy is to promote local products.. We don't want to import."

Waite—and other chefs, restauranteurs and vendors interviewed—are concerned about recent closures and potential restrictions facing Hawaii's fisheries. In December 1999, a federal judge closed 1.2 million square miles of prime fishing grounds to the Hawaii longline fleet until the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) completes an updated environmental impact statement for the fishery. The closed area may be expanded and is expected to last up to two years. In April 2000, the same environmental organization that filed the longline lawsuit petitioned the courts to close the NWHI bottomfish and lobster fisheries.

Hawaii bottomfish fisherman hauls in an onaga (long-tailed red snapper). A lawsuit in federal courts aims to close both the bottomfish and lobster fishery in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which contains two-thirds of the exclusive economic zone surrounding the state. (J. Rutka photo)

"We have a seafood restaurant, so it's going to kill us if the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) fisheries are closed," Waite says. "A swordfish and tuna closure would also kill us."

In addition, President Clinton announced in May the creation of an Office of Marine Protected Areas

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Local fisheries *continued from page 1*

(MPAs) and directed the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior to develop in 90 days a plan to permanently protect NWHI coral reef resources.

"I hope it doesn't hinder the way we've done business," Waite says. The restaurant serves an estimated 20 to 40 pounds of locally caught deepwater snapper each week as well as mahimahi, ono, opah, ahi and monchong caught by Hawaii vessels.

Hawaii's snapper is the most prized fish at many other fine-dining establishments as well. "Opakapaka [pink snapper] and onaga [long-tailed red snapper] are the two most popular fish on the menu," says Chef Robert "Bob" Reach, chef of John Dominis Restaurant in Honolulu. They account for 70 to 80 percent of fresh fish sales, he estimates.

Lance Kosaka, chef de cuisine of Alan Wong's Restaurant in Honolulu, agrees. "We use a lot of opaka and onaga. They are one of our signature dishes." He estimates that they make up at least 50 percent and, on various days, up to 60 to 70 percent of the fish dishes sold.

Vendors who provide the restaurants stress the importance of NWHI bottomfish.

"The NWHI provides local bottomfish at a decent price," says Bob Fram, co-owner of Garden and Valley Isle Seafood. Prices range from about $3.50 to $5 per pound to around $6 to $7 per pound in a tight market. By comparison, main Hawaiian Island snappers wholesale prices are $8 to $15 per pound. Prices fluctuate with the season, as red fish is traditionally served during certain holidays and occasions.

Five vessels account for the majority of the catch, Fram says. They land approximately 5,000 to 6,000 pounds of fish per boat, with trips lasting about 10 days. But it can be three weeks between landings, he adds. By comparison, main Hawaiian Island vessels—which fish closer to Hawaii's ports—bring in only about a dozen bottomfish each but arrive almost daily. The NWHI snappers average 8 to 15 pounds in size, while the main Hawaiian Island snappers weigh in at 2 to 7 pounds.

NWHI bottomfish are purchased by vendors that supply restaurants and other outlets. About 90 percent of the bottomfish, by weight, that Fram deals with comes from the NWHI. The small, more expensive bottomfish are typically picked up by sushi bars and retail markets.

Alan Nakashima, manager of Nakashima Fish Market in Chinatown, says families prefer 2- to 3-pound snapper. But a few at 5 pounds plus can be purchased to make steaks.

Guy Tamashiro, vice president of Tamashiro Market, agrees. "One to 3 pounds is prime size," he says. However, he adds, because today's economy is weak and very competitive, the NWHI bottomfish are "significant."

Keeping the NWHI bottomfish grounds open is also the concern of bottomfish fishermen throughout Hawaii. "It would be a tremendous

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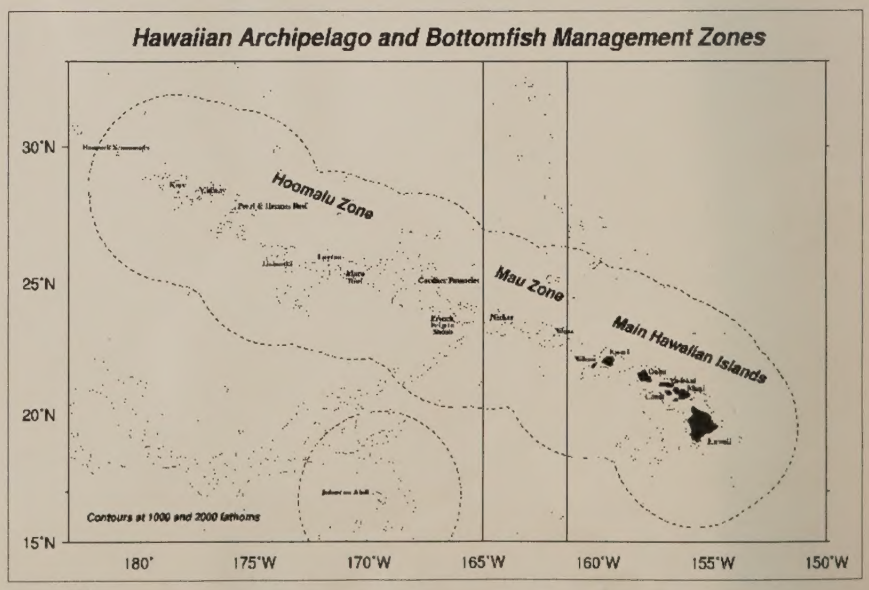
HAWAII BOTTOMFISH FISHERIES

	main Hawaiian Islands	Mau Zone (NWHI)	Hoomalu Zone (NWHI)
Landings in 1998	462,000 lbs (commercial only; recreational catches not recorded)	66,000 lbs	266,000 lbs
Management regime	**State Regulations** 1-lb minimum size for opakapaka, onaga, uku and ulua Prohibition on the use and possession of explosives and poisons Series of closed areas Open-access vessel registration	**Federal Regulations** Prohibition on the use of explosives, poisons, trawl nets or bottom-set gillnets Limited entry permit Protected species seminar attendance Observer coverage if requested by NMFS Mandatory reporting	**Federal Regulations** Same as Mau Zone, plus: No fishing on Hancock Seamounts for armorhead fish
Number of permits	2,142 state-registered bottomfish vessels (67% commercial)	10 commercial permits (7 in use; 2 reserved for eligible Native Hawaiian communities)	7 commercial permits



Clinton's Marine Conservation Orders Get Mixed Review

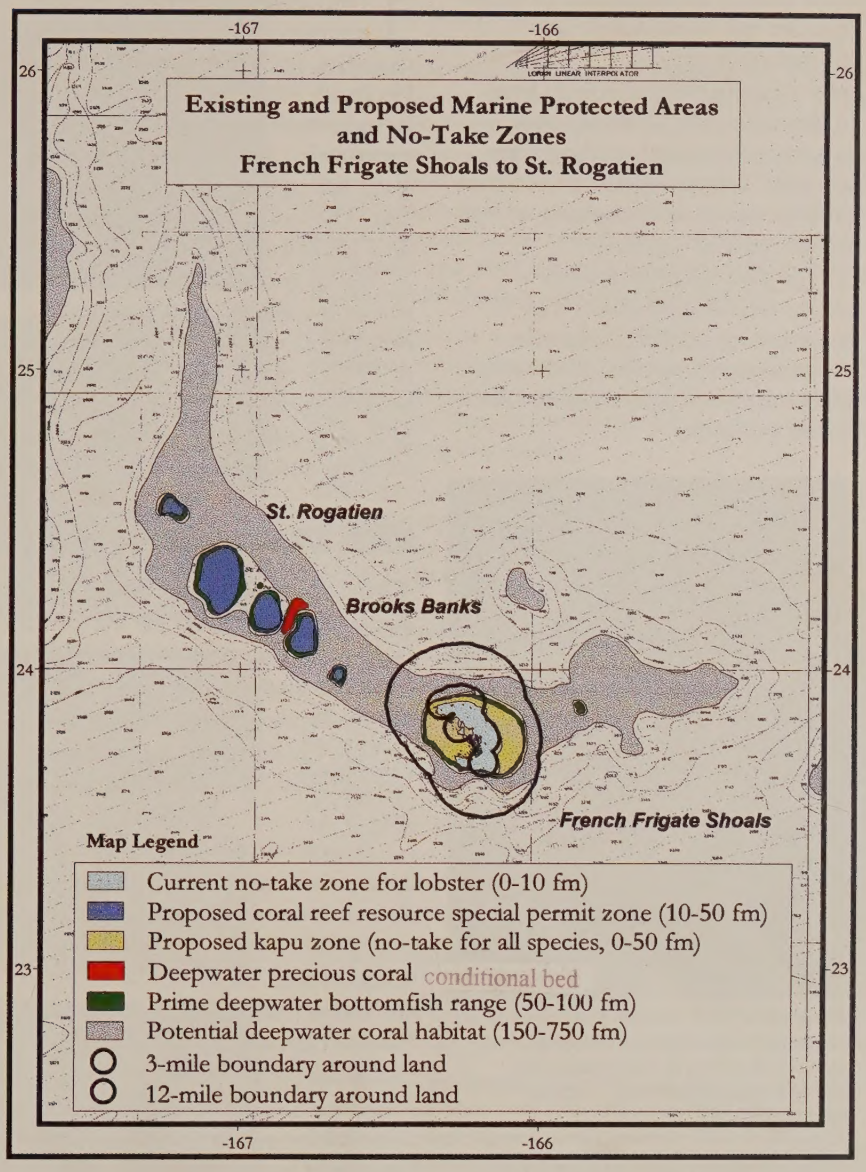
President Clinton on May 26 publicly directed the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior "to provide strong and lasting protection of the coral reef ecosystems of the Northwest [sic] Hawaiian Islands." " Working cooperatively with the State of Hawaii and consulting with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council," the Secretaries are "to develop recommendations within 90 days for a new, coordinated management regime to increase protection of the ecosystem and provide for sustainable use." Further, the Secretaries are to recommend "whether appropriate stewardship for the submerged lands and waters of the Northwest [sic] Hawaiian Islands warrants [presidential] authority to extend permanent protection to objects of historic or scientific interest or to protect the natural and cultural resources of this important area."

Speaking before a group of environmentalists and beach-goers at Assateague Island, Md., Clinton also ordered the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior to develop a national system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the Environmental Protection Agency to "expeditiously propose new science-based regulations, as necessary, to ensure appropriate levels of protection for the environment." To carry out the requirements of the order, an MPA Federal Advisory Committee and an MPA Center are to be established within the Department of Commerce.

US Representative Don Young (R-Alaska) quickly criticized the president's actions. Clinton "should work cooperatively with Congress on marine life and coastal protections instead of bypassing Congress and establishing a bureaucratic tidal wave of new regulations."

"Just as his national monument designations on land have created a flurry of protests, his actions with our oceans and coasts could create the same negative reactions," Young said.

"In addition, several initiatives are already underway to determine the need for MPAs, how they should be designed and developed, how broad they should be, what goals we are attempting to achieve, and what authorities already exist to achieve those goals. This announcement is premature and undercuts the dialog that is already in progress," Young added. "This is not the correct way to address these serious issues."



Consistent with the president's stated goals, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (FMP) will protect the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) coral reef ecosystem while ensuring continued sustainable harvests by existing FMP fisheries. Currently, there is hardly any fishing for coral reef resources nor for precious corals in the NWHI. The Council's plan has been under research for five years and under development for two years. It is largely a proactive measure, since the potential threat to the coral reefs of the NWHI by exploitation of marine resource, coastal development and

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Clinton's Marine *continued from page 3*

other sources are considered to be low (e.g., see the World Resources Institute Web page at www.wri.org/indictrs/reefocea.htm). In developing the Council's plan, comments have been received from scientists, fisherman, non-government environmental and indigenous groups and the general public.

The plan identifies a series of MPAs, including all waters 0 to 50 fathoms deep in NWHI. Furthermore, nearly 24 percent of the total area would be designated as no-take marine preserves.

Conservation and management through an ecosystem approach are the basis of the Council's draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan. —Chad Yoshinaga photo

The Council has received comments on the plan from the National Marine Fisheries Service's Assistant Administrator for Fisheries and is now finalizing the document for formal public hearings under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. With the president on the bandwagon "to increase protection of the ecosystem and provide for sustainable use," it is hoped that those in Washington, DC, will treat the Coral Reef Ecosystem FMP as a priority item and expedite its movement through the NEPA process.

The Nature Conservancy Announces Palmyra Purchase Plan

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) announced in May that it had signed an agreement to purchase the US Pacific Island possession of Palmyra Atoll. The environmental organization is now working to raise some $30 million to complete the deal. The atoll is currently owned by the Fullard-Leo family.

Waters surrounding the atoll are part of the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) managed by the Council. In 1998, a record number of Hawaii-based longline vessels fished in the EEZ surrounding the atoll. A smaller handline and troll vessel from Hawaii has also fished these waters recently. In addition, a fisherman from Seattle has a lease with the Fullard-Leo family to operate a fishing base on the island.

The Council recently submitted an amendment to the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP) that would establish permit and reporting requirements for handline and troll vessels fishing around US Pacific Island possessions, including Palmyra. Such requirements for Hawaii-based longline vessels are already established. The Council is also working to include the US Pacific Islands possessions in the Bottomfish and Crustacean FMPs.

NWHI Albatross Steering Group Is Needed, Bird Experts Agree

Participants of the 2nd Black-footed Albatross Population Biology Workshop voted unanimously for the formation of a consortium or steering group to oversee the long-term monitoring of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) albatross populations. About 30 bird experts worldwide from throughout the Pacific attended the workshop on May 12, following the Second International Albatross Conference held May 8–12.

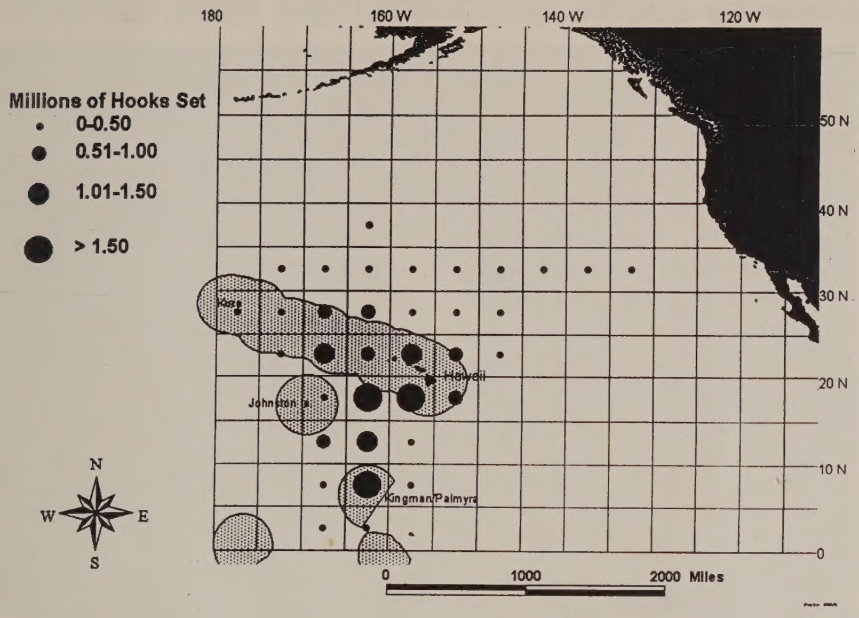
"A working group composed of agency and non-governmental organizations is necessary to effectively monitor the NWHI albatrosses over the long-term," argued the workshop coordinator, Kathy Cousins, of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Island Area Office (PIAO). Monitoring seabird breeding colonies is a critical component to assessing the impacts of human-induced mortality, such as mortality caused by longline fishing, on seabird populations, the participants agreed.

The current world population of breeding black-footed albatrosses is approximately 62,000 pairs in 12 colonies. Sixty thousand pairs nest in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The largest colonies are at Laysan Island (23,297 pairs) and Midway Atoll (20,510 pairs). —Sylvia Spalding photo

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific Islands Ecoregion, was identified as lead for the working group in the first year. NMFS PIAO, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, US Geological Survey National Bird-Banding Laboratory, Pacific Seabird Group, American Bird Conservancy and National Audubon Society's Living Ocean Program were identified as possible members.

The highest priority for the group is the analyses of the last three to four years of banding effort, the workshop participants recommended.

Both this and last year's workshop were sponsored by the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. A limited number of the first workshop proceedings is available from the Council.



Total number of hooks set by area in 1998 by the Hawaii-based longline fleet.

Indigenous Coordinator Joins Council 'Ohana

Charles Kaaiai has joined the Council staff as indigenous coordinator. He brings with him more than three decades of experience as a community development leader and activist for native rights in Hawaii. He is currently working on the following Council initiatives:

Community Development Programs to provide access to fisheries for western Pacific communities. The eligibility criteria for participating communities was sent in June 1998 to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. Twenty percent of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) Mau Zone limited entry bottomfish permits were subsequently set aside for eligible Native Hawaiian communities. Kaaiai is now working on defining community development needs for each island area and locating funding for loans to eligible communities.

Charles Kaaiai brings to the Council 30 years of experience in community development and native rights activism.

Community Demonstration Projects to foster and promote traditional indigenous fishing practices. Kaaiai anticipates announcing a request for proposals this summer. Following review by the Demonstration Projects Advisory Panel, workshops will be held to help priority candidates fill out required federal forms.

Marine Conservation Plans to define uses for funds to be collected from Pacific Insular Area fishery agreements. Kaaiai is working with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) headquarters office in Washington, DC, to facilitate its approval of plans for the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund and the Guam and Northern Mariana Islands Marine Conservation Plans. The Council has approved the American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan, but it has not yet been forwarded to NMFS.

Workshops on the use of green sea turtles by indigenous people to allow takes of the species for cultural purposes. Workshops similar to the one that was held in the Northern Mariana Islands in November 1998 will be held in Hawaii, American Samoa and Guam.

Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan to include the viewpoint of indigenous, traditional relationships.

Group to Develop Blue Shark Uses

A working group on blue shark utilization is being organized by the Council. Individuals in and outside of Hawaii have expressed interest in developing products and markets for blue shark products, including meat for consumption, hides for drum heads and livers and cartilage for pharmaceutics. They have indicated that research and development would be necessary.

The Hawaii longline fleet catches approximately 100,000 blue sharks annually. Since 1993, the crews of some vessels began to increasingly retain the sharks for their fins. In 1999, the Council contracted a study entitled "Overview of Worldwide Blue Shark Utilization and the Pertinence to the US Based Hawaiian Longline Fishery." The National Marine Fisheries Service also completed a study on the socioeconomic aspects of shark fins in the Western Pacific Region and is completing a study on the cultural significance of sharks in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Council subsequently adopted an amendment to the Pelagic Fisheries Management Plan that places a 50,000 quota for blue sharks (the average 1996–98 retention level) on the fleet. The amendment also limits the fleet's retention of non-blue sharks to one per trip (to be landed whole or dressed) and bans the use of demersal longline gear in federal waters around Hawaii. It has been sent to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

Persons interested in the shark utilization study and/or the working group may contact Kevin Kelly or Paul Dalzell at the Council.

NMFS Cuts Hawaii Long-line Observer Program

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southwest Region (SWR) announced in May that observers for the Hawaii longline fleet would be reduced from 14 to two. NMFS SWR Acting Regional Administrator Rod McInnis said the program was more than $500,000 in the red.

On hearing of the impending observer reduction, the Council engaged NMFS and industry representatives in a discussion about the future of the Hawaii longline observer program.

"The industry might be willing to help fund the program," indicated Jim Cook, Council chair and co-owner of Pacific Ocean Producers, a fishing supply company. "However, the purpose and design of the program needs to be established first."

According to a 1998 workshop on observer programs, the Hawaii program is one of 28 nationwide. Fifteen are funded by government, six by industry and one jointly by government and industry.

"The industry-funded programs are for fisheries with a quota system," notes Kitty Simonds, Council executive director. There are no quotas for the Hawaii longline fishery, except for a Council-adopted quota for blue sharks that has been submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

Since its inception in 1976, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has encouraged the development and use of observer programs to gather data needed for sound fishery management decisions. The Hawaii longline observer program was subsequently created in 1994. It was initially designed to gather information on interactions with sea turtles protected under the Endangered Species Act. Through the years, the program has grown to include observations on seabird and marine mammal interactions and incidental takes of sharks as well as turtle tagging and biological sampling of fish. The data provided by the program is vital to the Council in making its management decisions.

Local fisheries *continued from page 2*

loss, after you spend 25 years developing skills as a fisherman and a seaman to be told you can't fish anymore with no just cause," notes NWHI bottomfish permit holder Dave Kalthoff, who has fished the islands commercially since 1974.

"The NWHI fishery is not huge," notes Greg Holzman of Kauai, who fishes the main Hawaiian Islands. But, he says, closing or restricting the NWHI fishery would put more pressure on the main Hawaiian Islands, where bottomfish fishermen have already been forced into more concentrated areas. Bottomfish area closures were implemented by the State of Hawaii in 1998 because the main Hawaiian Islands populations of onaga and ehu [red snapper] are locally depleted. The populations of these bottomfish belong to the same stock as those in the NWHI, which are healthy, so the species are not considered overfished.

But Holzman's primary concern is the affect a NWHI closure or restriction would have on the market. "The wholesalers will go more and more to foreign sources," he speculates. "The more foreign fish that will be readily accepted by the public, the more we are shooting our own foot."

"We need to protect our good name and good product," Holzman emphasized. "Opakapaka from Australia just seems wrong to me."

McCain agrees. "Imported fish would hurt the visitor experience," he says. "The objectives of environmentalists and politicians can be reached without this kind of damage."

Hawaii longline vessels target sashimi-quality tuna and swordfish. Management of the fisheries relies on logbooks, NMFS observer data and other information.

Americans Would Rather Import Fish Than Catch Them

For the 10th consecutive year, the value and volume of fish and shellfish imported by the US set records, according to the 1999 annual report released by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Overall, the value of imports increased 10 percent to a record $9 billion, and the volume of imports increased 7 percent to 3.9 billion pounds.

The report, which is based on Bureau of Census data, also showed that the value of US seafood exports rose about 26 percent in 1999 to $2.8 billion, while volume increased about 18 percent to two billion pounds, reversing a three-year declining trend.

International Conference to Focus on Derelict Fishing Gear

Endangered Hawaiian monk seals at Pearl and Hermes Reef in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are attracted to fishing nets that have washed ashore. The Marine Debris Conference, Aug. 6–11 in Honolulu, will address growing concerns about the impacts of derelict fishing gear on endangered, threatened and protected species and the marine environment in the Pacific. —Chad Yoshinaga photo, NMFS Protected Species Investigation

While derelict fishing gear constitutes less than 20 percent of the marine debris in the ocean, there is growing concern about its impacts on endangered, threatened and protected species and the marine environment in the Pacific region. Since 1982, divers have found 170 endangered Hawaiian monk seals entangled in nets. Twenty-two were found entangled in 1999 alone. Also last year, more than 35 tons of derelict fishing gear were removed from the reefs and shoreline of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 tons of gear still remain.

To help solve this problem, the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is sponsoring the International Marine Debris Conference on Derelict Fishing Gear and the Ocean Environment, August 6 to 11, at the Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu. The conference is expected to draw about 300 scientists, industry representatives, government agencies and members of the general public.

"Industry participation is essential in solving this Pacific-wide problem," notes Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, a co-sponsor of the event.

Scheduled speakers include US Senators Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka, US Congressman Neil Abercrombie, NOAA Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere James Baker, explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau and James Coe, deputy director, Alaska Fisheries Center, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

An estimated 68 percent of the lost or discarded fishing gear that reaches Hawaii is believed to come from trawl and gill net fisheries operating in the North Pacific. The gear is carried to Hawaii by prevalent ocean currents. Longline fisheries—especially those targeting swordfish—are also a source of debris such as lightsticks, lighters and monofilament line, which have proved fatal to albatross chicks. The NWHI is home to the Pacific's major colonies of Laysan and black-footed albatross.

Through wave action, grounded derelict fishing gear can abrade coral reefs, scour the sea floor and damage other essential fish habitat. These actions may facilitate colonization by non-native species and potentially disrupt the natural ecological balance of an area.

The Hawaiian Islands are home to more than 5,000 marine plants and animals, a quarter of which are found nowhere else on Earth. Hawaii coral reefs represent almost 84 percent of all the known coral reefs under US jurisdiction. About 70 percent of US coral reefs are in the NWHI.

On the main Hawaiian Islands, about 80 percent of marine debris comes from land sources. Last year, volunteers picked up 114 tons of debris from the beaches and nearshore waters of these inhabited islands.

Conference co-sponsors are NMFS, Western Pacific and North Pacific Regional Fishery Management Councils, Hawaii Longline Association, US Coast Guard, US Department of State, US Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program, Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, Hawaii Coastal Zone Management Program, City and County of Honolulu, Center for Marine Conservation and Hawaii Audubon Society.

105th Council Meeting

July 9–11, 2000
Midway Atoll

The Council will discuss issues regarding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and US Pacific Island possessions.

COUNCIL CALENDAR

JUNE

25–28 Marine Recreational Fisheries Symposium, Town & Country Hotel and Convention Center, San Diego

26–29 2nd Biennial Fisheries Observer Program Workshop, Delta St. John's Hotel and Conference Center, St. John's, New Foundland, Canada

JULY

4–8 East-West Center/EWC Association 2000 International Conference, "Building an Asia Pacific Community: The East-West Center in the 21st Century," Hawaiian Regent Hotel, Honolulu

5–12 South Pacific Community Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish Meeting, Noumea, New Caledonia

9–12 105th Council Meeting, Midway Atoll

9–12 The Coastal Society's 2000 Conference, Portland, Ore.

16–21 National Marine Educators Association 26th Annual Conference, Long Beach, Calif.

AUGUST

5–7 5th US Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, Pago Pago, American Samoa

6–11 International Marine Debris Conference on Derelict Fishing Gear and the Ocean Environment, Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu

30–Sept. 5 Multilateral High-Level Conference on Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Central and Western Pacific, Nandi, Fiji

SEPTEMBER

15–20 90th Annual International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Conference, Indianapolis, Ind.

23-25 National Fisheries Institute Annual Convention, Los Angeles

OCTOBER

10–12 75th Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting, Council Conference Room, Honolulu

16–20 Islands VI Conference: "Small Islands in the Third Millennium," Isle of Skye, Scotland

17–20 106th Council Meeting, Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu

23–27 9th International Coral Reef Symposium, Bali International Convention Center, Bali, Indonesia

NOVEMBER

6–9 International Fishers Forum on Solving the Incidental Capture of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries, The Heritage Hotel, Auckland, NZ

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Council Chair Cook to End Term

On August 10, Jim Cook will end his third and final consecutive term as a Council member. During the last three of these nine years, he has served as the chair.

Jim Cook at the Council's 20th anniversary reception in 1996 at Washington Place, Honolulu. Cook's nine-year term as Council member and three-year term as the Council chair ends this August

"There are a couple of things I'd like to say to the Council as I'm leaving," Cook said. "In my view, the two most important parts of the process, which are in need of constant attention so they don't slip away from us, are regional decision-making and science-based management. Today, there are serious threats to both concepts. Threats come from all angles—ourselves; nationally, such as Congress; and internationally, via Plans of Actions for birds, sharks and capacity developed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

"I also feel strongly that it is important for the Council to be involved in the Pacific-wide management of fisheries," he added.

When he looks back at people who made a difference, he notes those who have been constant critics of the Council. "They have contrasting views, but the process has worked," Cook said. "It hasn't been what I wanted or what the other folks wanted all the time. But the thoughts of those who are willing to stay involved come out in the process in the end."

Cook is a co-owner of the Honolulu fishing supply company Pacific Ocean Producers and the longline company Vessel Management. He says he "intends on being active in the politics of fishing and looks forward to helping the Council in any way to continue the process."